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ABSTRACT

Theories and studies of adult development are largely confined to adult male career development and ignore a moral or faith dimension of adult development. To determine the faith and moral dimension of adult couples, three hypotheses were examined, i.e.,: (1) religion is a significant dimension in their consciousness; (2) the family is integrally related to their faith development; and (3) their level of faith and moral development correlates with stage four (Individuating Reflexive Faith) of James Fowler's stages of faith. Middle-class couples (N=11) of various religious denominations participated in a 4-hour biographical interview and answered inquires about their chief concerns and joys, religious views, and feelings about prayer and the meaning of life. Quantifiable results were computed according to Fowler's faith stages and Kohlberg's moral stages. Results, in general, confirmed the hypotheses. Religion was a vital dimension in the lives of those interviewed. The findings challenge the cognitive approach to faith suggested by Fowler because the relational and prayer aspect of faith appears to have meaning for the agnostics interviewed as well as the church-affiliated couples. (PAS)

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THE FAITH DEVELOPMENT OF SELECTED ADULT COUPLES

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1982

CG 016400

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THE FAITH DEVELOPMENT OF SELECTED ADULT COUPLES

Theories and studies of adult development have been largely confined to theories of adult male-career development. (Levinson, 1978; Gould 1977; Osherson, 1977; Osherson, 1980; Vaillant, 1977). Even in his description of the mid-life crisis, Levinson made no reference to a meaning or faith dimension. Osherson's study of twenty professional and business men who changed their careers at mid-life to a career in art, while referring briefly to the meaning dimension, never examined the role of religion in the lives of these men. Later in another study, Osherson examined the effect of marrying early on career advancement and satisfaction, but he never examined the relation of family to one's happiness and self-awareness. The question arises: Were these adults never concerned with faith and family, or were the questions never asked by the interviewers?

Meanwhile, James Fowler formerly of Harvard Divinity School and now at Candler Theological School at Emory University was working out his theory of faith development based largely on the cognitive structural developmental approach of Jean Piaget. His first full length book, Stages of Faith, was published by Harper in 1981.

The current study was designed to look at the faith dimension of adult couples according to a type of biographical interview adapted from Fowler's Faith interview (Fowler, 1981, p. 310). While the study is primarily descriptive, several

hypotheses were formulated:

(1) That religion, broadly defined, would be a significant dimension in the consciousness of these couples, in their lives and in their view of themselves.

(2) That family, a dimension hitherto not mentioned or given little consideration by Levinson and Vaillant is an important factor in the lives of these couples and is integrally related to their faith development.

(3) That the modal stage of these well educated couples would be Fowler's stage 4 with no significant difference between husband and wife or between the various religious institutions.

In this pilot project we were not concerned so much with comparing the faith and moral development of members of different denominations, even though some computations were made comparing them. Our hypothesis was based on the belief that there would be greater similarities between couples of similar educational and socio-economic backgrounds than differences even though they express their beliefs in different institutions.

The Subjects

Of the many couples, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish, in suburban New England who were contacted, eleven finally agreed to be interviewed:

6	Roman Catholics
1	Episcopalian
1	Methodist
1	Lutheran
1	Jewish
1	"mixed" Roman Catholic and Presbyterian

The Subjects (cont'd)

AGE:

average: 40.7
men: 41.7
women: 39.7

range: 33-51 yrs

EDUCATION

All: 16.8 yrs.
men: 18.6
women: 15

2 Ph.D; 7 M.A (3 women)
1 M.D.; 1 LLD

MARRIAGE

average: 18 yrs
age 11-30 yrs

NUMBER OF CHILDREN

average: 3.3
range: 1 mo. to 27 yrs
6 families with children under 15

NUMBER OF WOMEN WORKING

3 or 27%
2 teaching; 1 social worker
3 others were considering going back to work

This sample then is clearly not a random sample but is largely self-selected. However, it can be reasonably assumed that they are not unique families. While they may not be typical since the nuclear family is no longer typical in the United States, they can be considered to be representative of a certain segment of the American population.

The Fowler Paradigm

James Fowler, while basing his six stages on the cognitive structural developmental approach of Piaget, defines faith as "an orientation of the total person giving purpose and goals to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions" (Fowler, 1981, p. 14). The stages move from a simple undifferentiated awareness of reality through highly derived (from society's institutions) socialization stages to self-chosen meanings in the last two

stages which recognize the relativism and limited quality of human knowledge. A brief description of the specific stages is given in the Appendix.

Method of Research

The couples were contacted by this researcher and her assistant who set up appointments for the taped interviews on selected Saturdays throughout the Academic year, 1980-1981. The interview was based on Fowler's interview questions (1981 pp. 312) asking for significant events and probing for the meaning assigned to these events. Specific questions on faith, pryaer and view of God and religion were asked later on in the interview. The Heinz moral dilemma formulated by Kohlberg closed the interview. Husband and wife were interviewed separately. The interview lasted from three to four hours for each couple.

All parties agreed to be taped. The interviews were then transcribed and scored by graduate students who had studied Fowler's theory and method. The main researcher also scored each interview and discussed with the graduate student the qualitative and quantitative results until a consensus was reached. In 80% of the interviews there was agreement. Differences were of one stage or less in each case. The interviews are now being sent to Fowler at Candler for a final scoring.

The scorers were asked to look at certain key aspects, some of which had been described by Fowler as characteristics

of faith development:

(1) Bounds of Social awareness

(2) Perspective taking

(3) Symbolic functioning

(4) Locus of authority

While most of the adults had widened their locus of authority and had begun to describe their beliefs in terms of their own reflection on life, and while they also had freed themselves from early almost mythic literal views of God, there was some constriction in their bounds of social awareness and perspective-taking. In fact, Bounds of Social Awareness was one of the best indicators in scoring faith development. Some subjects could articulate their views of the meaning of life and religion fairly maturely, but their concerns rarely went beyond their families to their own ethnic group. The same subjects had difficulty seeing any viewpoint other than their own.

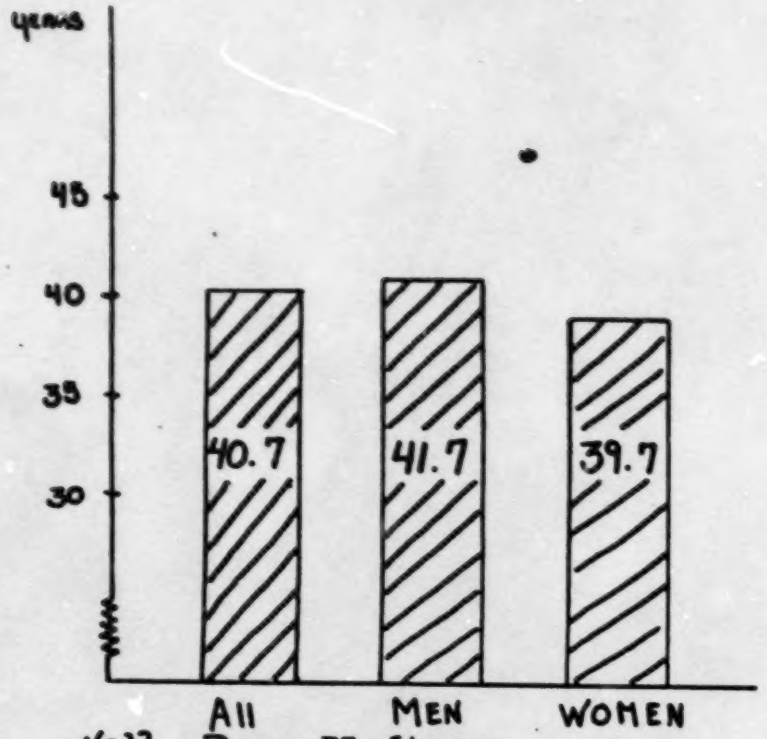
Because of previous adult research, we also examined the reason for career choice and the relation of their faith to their marriage as they perceived this relation.

Results

The results are given below in chart form. In general, the hypotheses were confirmed.

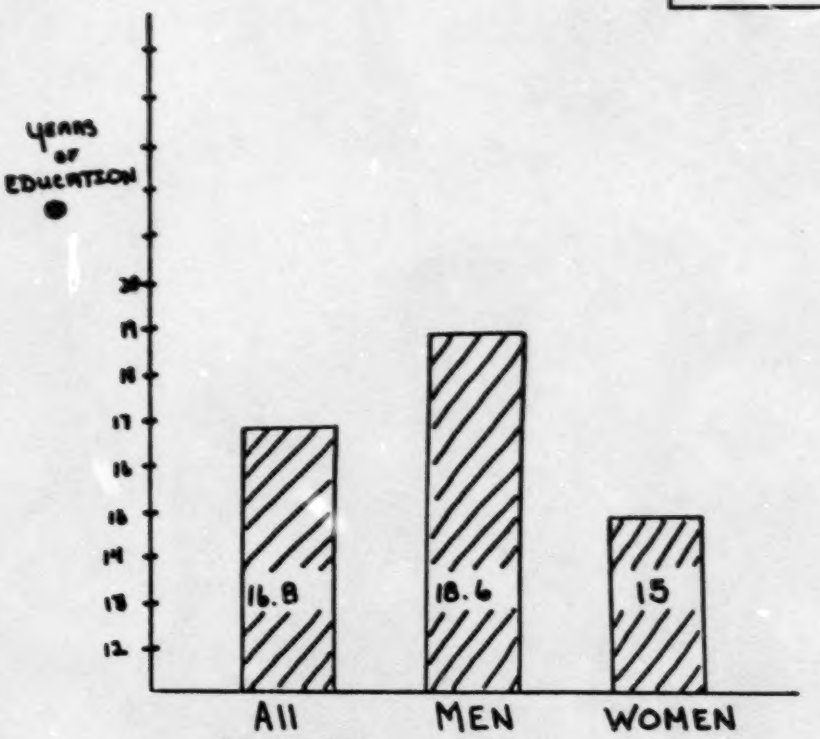
DEMOGRAPHY OF COUPLES

German
Adult Faith



N=22 Range 35-51 years

2 in 50+51
8 in 35-39 Range
12 in 40-50 Range



EDUCATION

7 Masters (3 Women)
1 Lawyer
2 Ph. D. (Science)
1 M.D.

FIGURE 1

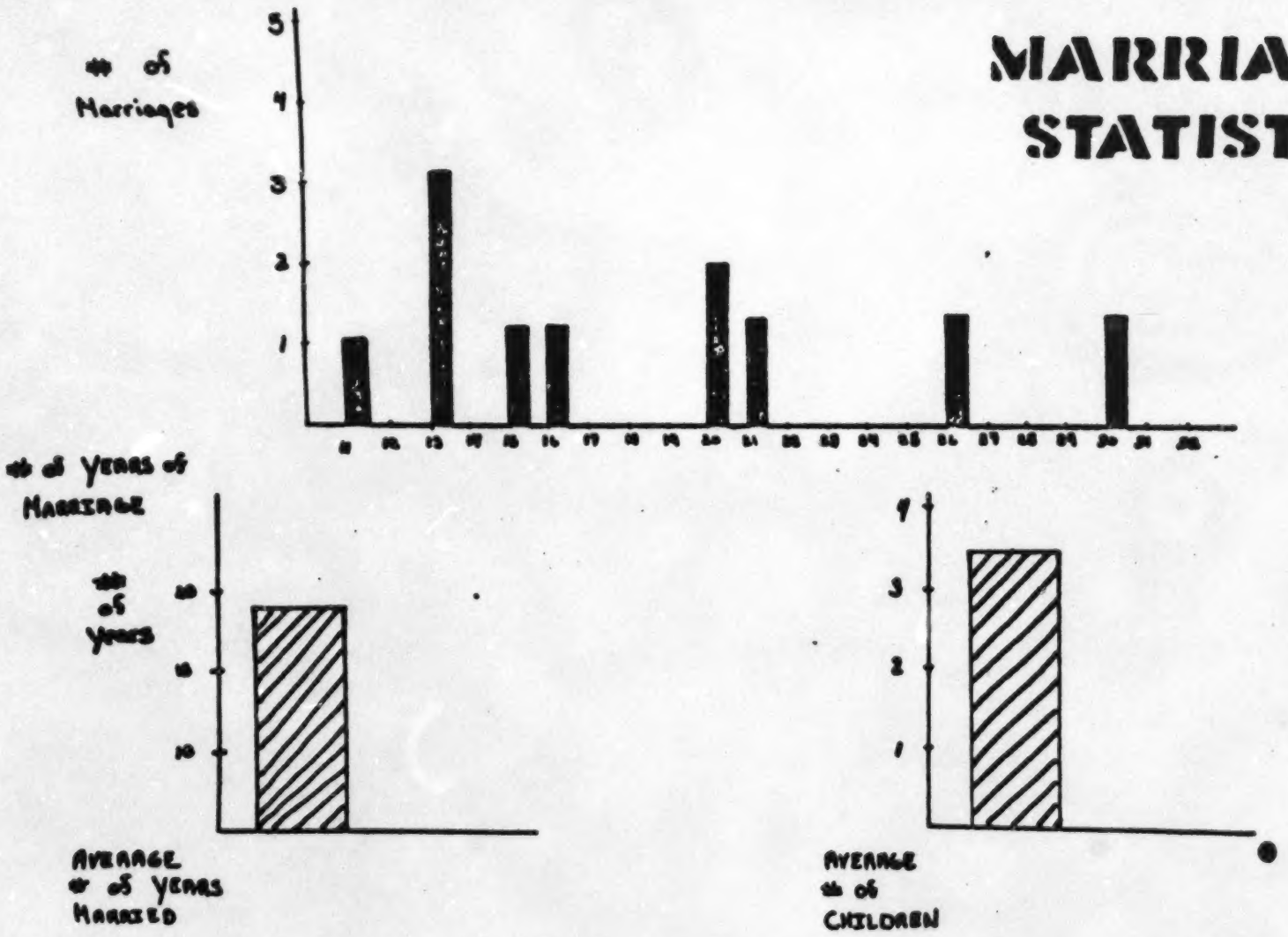

MARRIAGE STATISTICS
# of Marriages
5
4
3
2
1
# of Years of Marriage
# of Years
AVERAGE # of YEARS MARRIED
AVERAGE # of CHILDREN

FIGURE 2

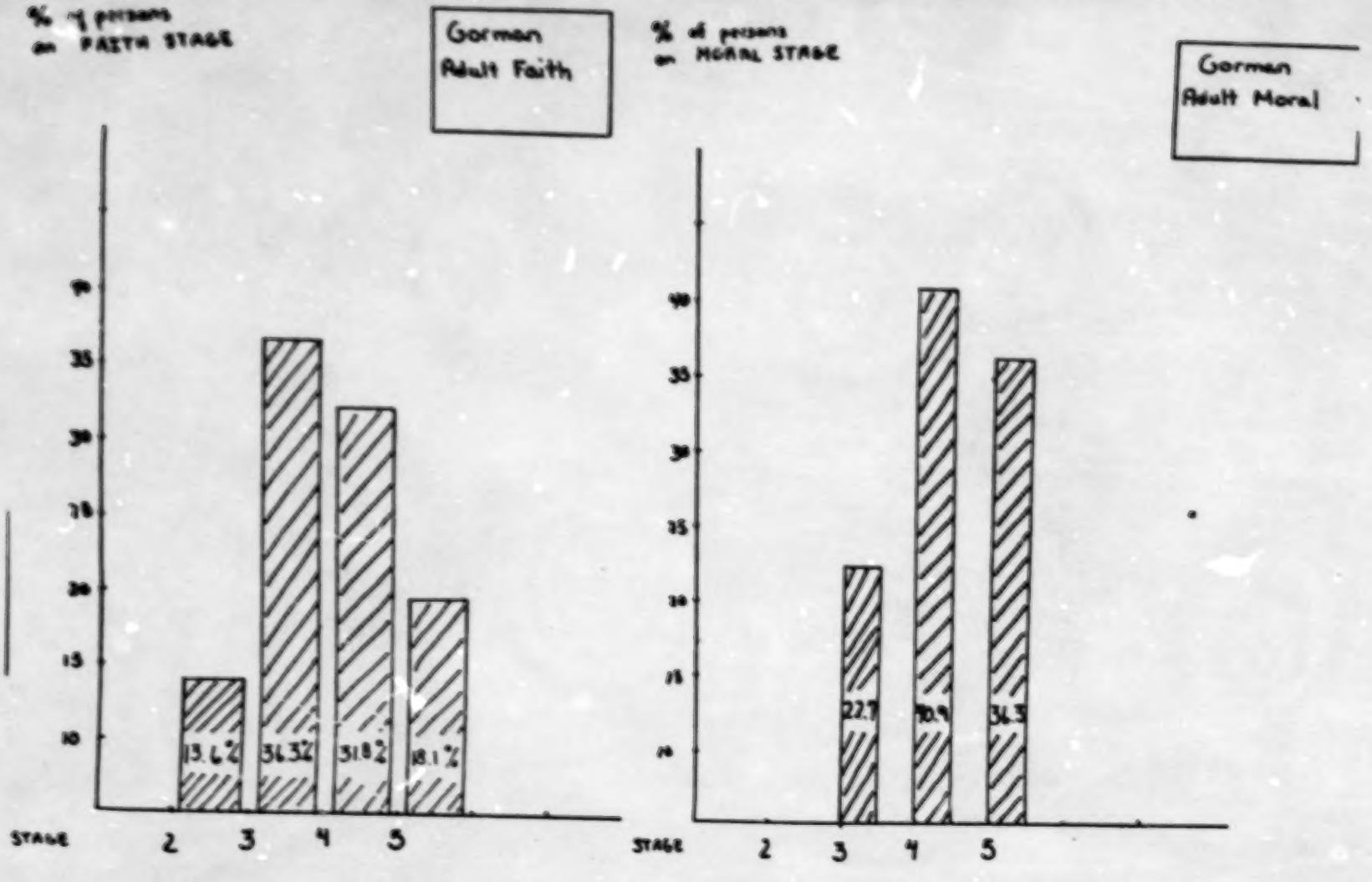
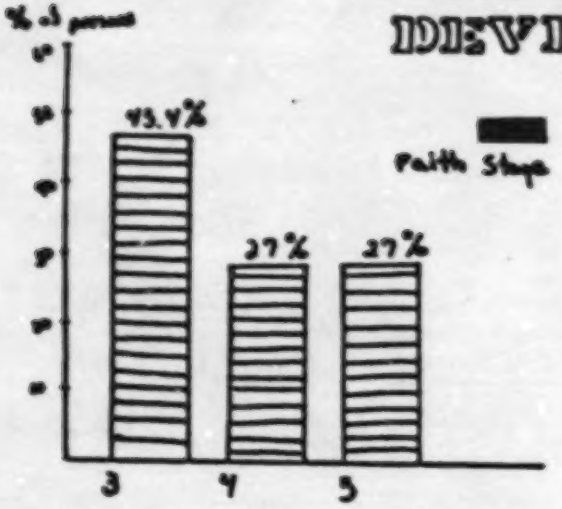

% of persons on FAITH STAGE
German Adult Faith
13.6%
36.3%
31.8%
18.1%
STAGE
2
3
4
5
% of persons on MORAL STAGE
German Adult Moral
22.7
40.9
36.3
STAGE
2
3
4
5

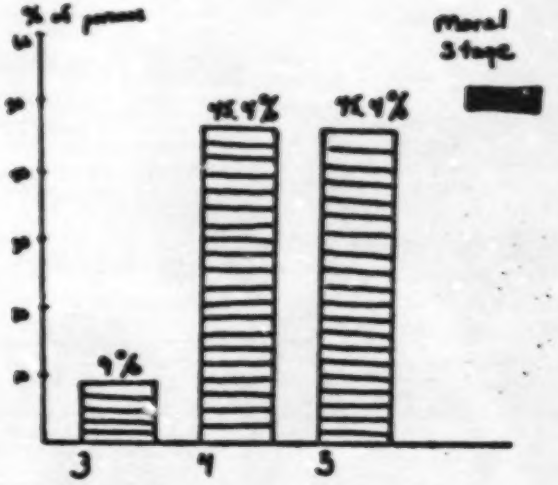
FIGURE 3

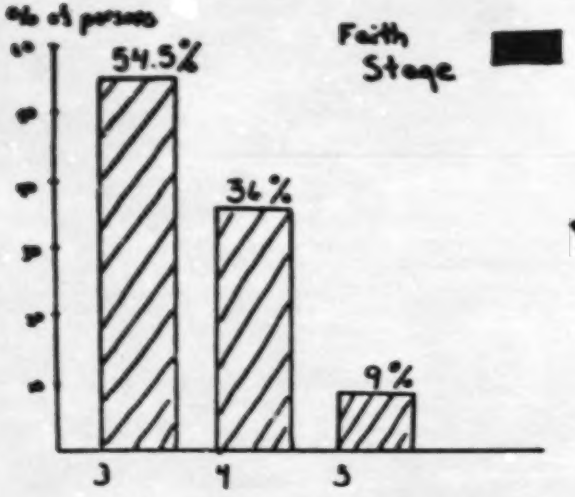
ADULT FAITH DEVELOPMENT



MEN

N = 11





WOMEN

N = 11

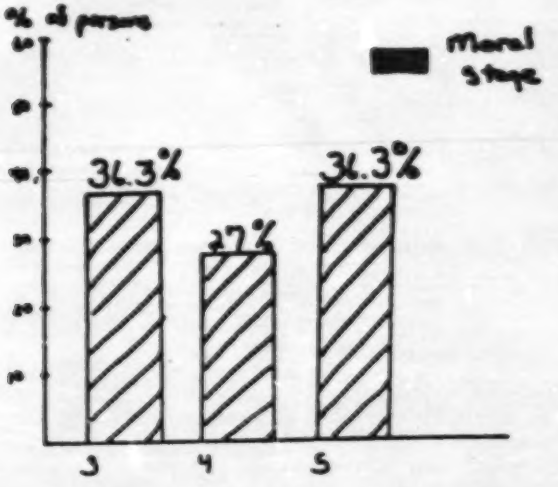


Figure 4

ADULT FAITH DEVELOPMENT

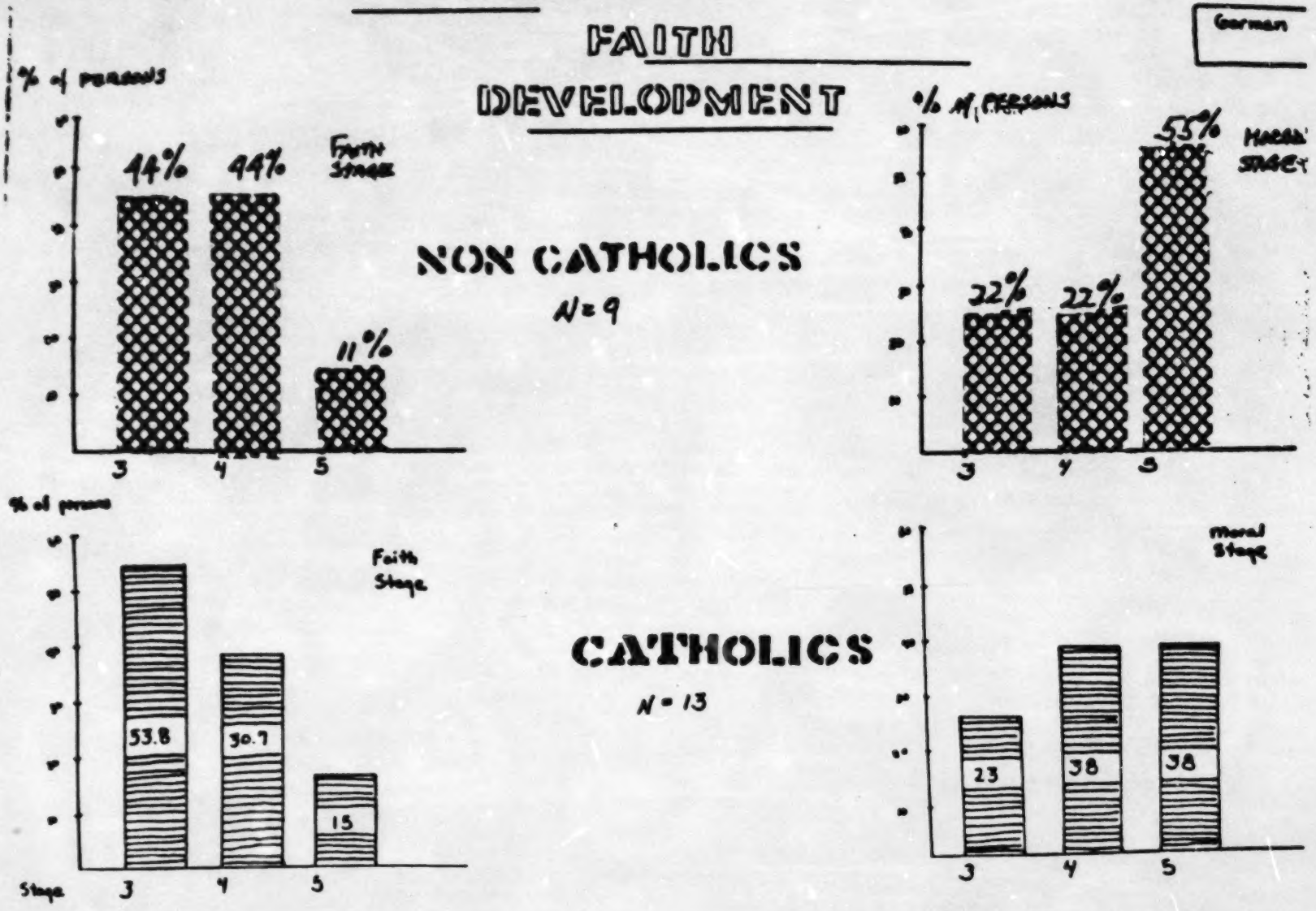


FIGURE 5

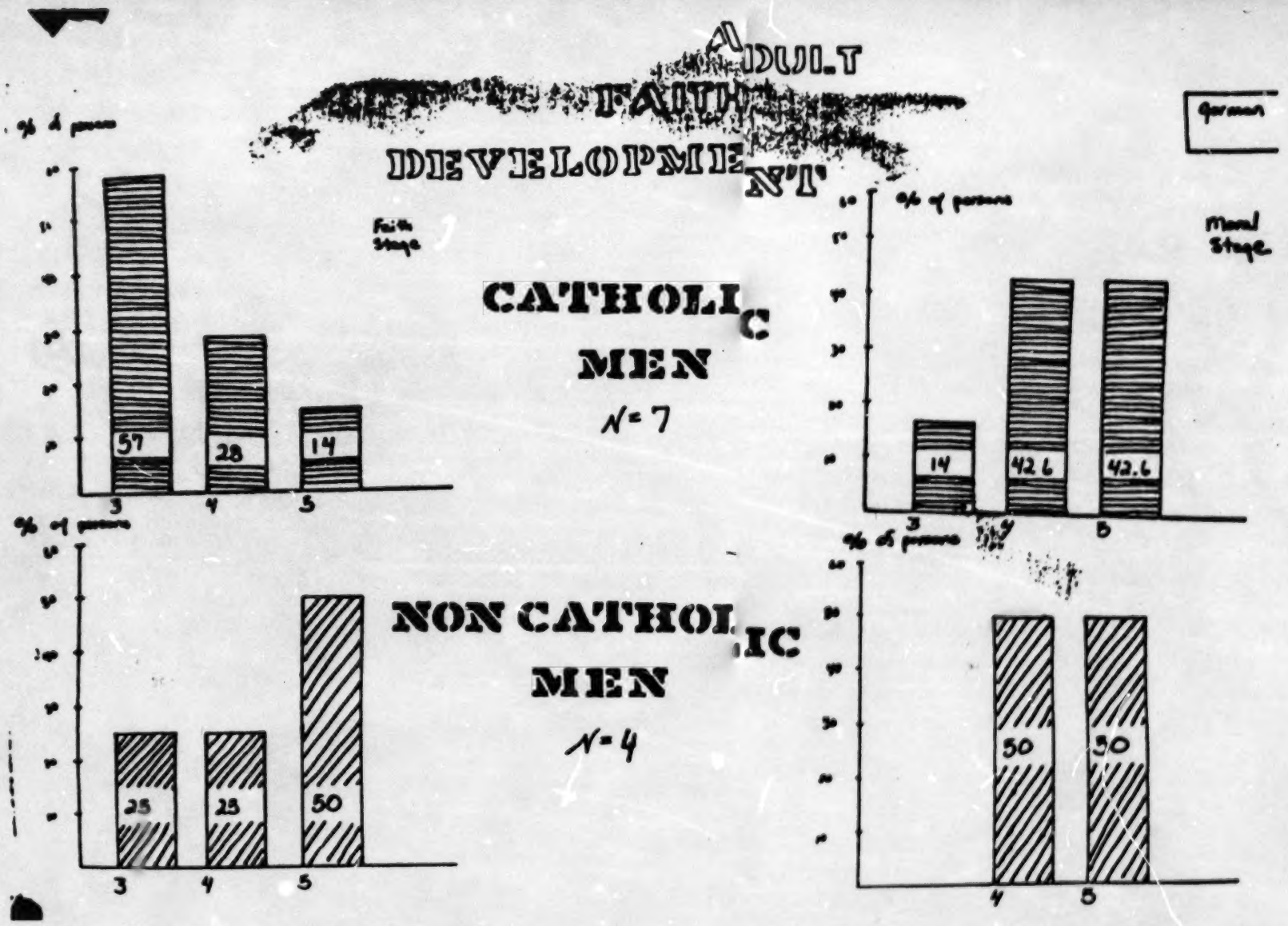

ADULT
FAITH
DEVELOPMENT
% of persons
Faith Stage
57
28
14
3
4
5
CATHOLIC
MEN
N=7
% of persons
Moral Stage
14
42.6
42.6
3
4
5
% of persons
25
25
50
3
4
5
NON CATHOLIC
MEN
N=4
% of persons
50
50
4
5

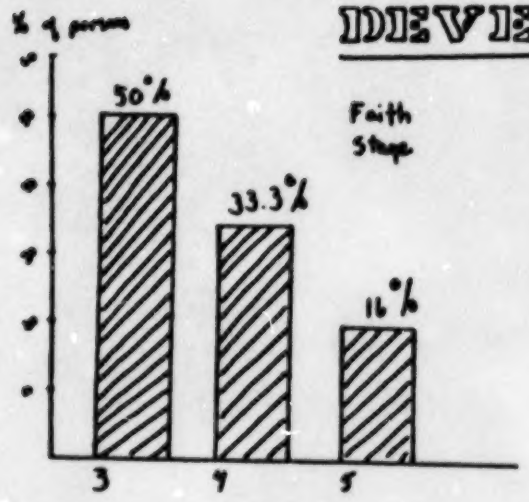
FIGURE 6

ADULT _____

FAITH _____

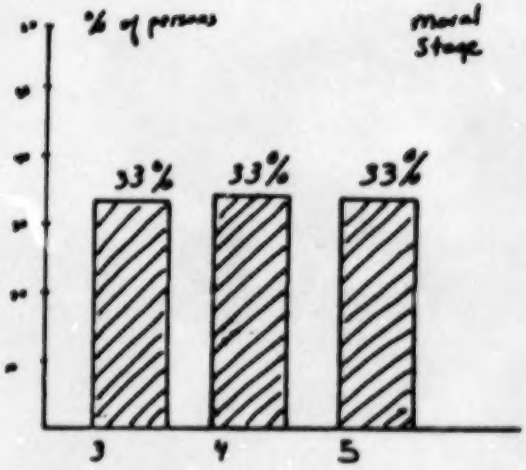
DEVELOPMENT

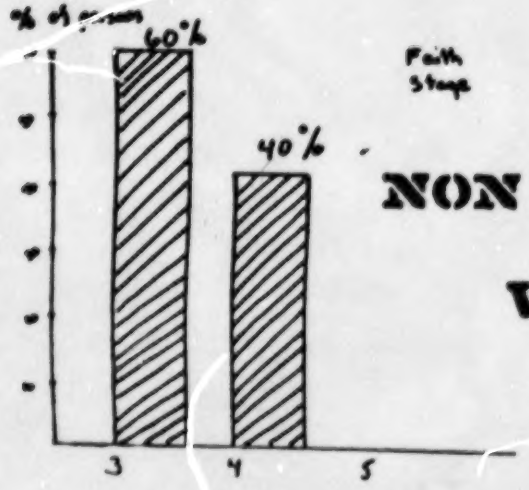
German



CATHOLIC WOMEN

N = 6





NON CATHOLIC WOMEN

N = 5

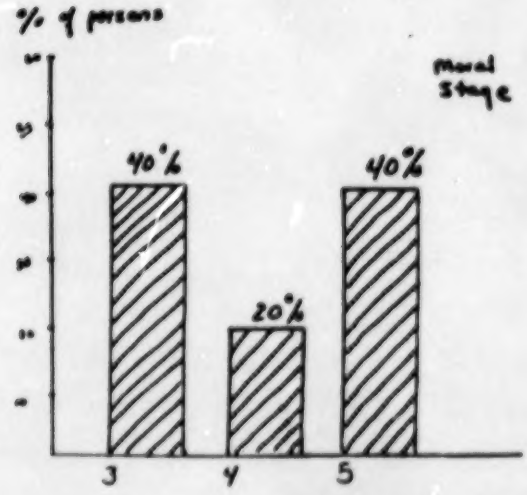


FIGURE 7

As can be seen on the graphs 36 % were on Faith Stage 3 and 31.8 % were on Faith Stage 4 which confirmed the hypothesis. A larger percentage 36.3% were on Moral stage 5 than on Faith Stage 5 (18.1%).

When breaking down the results by sex categories, while 45% of the men were on faith Stage 3 only 9% were on the moral stage 3. The patterr was reversed on the two higher faith and moral stages -- 27% on each of the faith stages 4 and 5 and 45% on each of the moral stages 4 and 5.

The women were not so clearly differentiated although there were more on a higher moral stage than on high faith stages. Fifty-four percent of the women were on faith stage 3 while only 36% of them were on moral stage 3. The big difference was that while only 9% were on faith stage 5, 36% were on moral stage 5.

In comparing the Catholics with the Non-Catholics, 53% of the Catholics were on Faith Stage 3 while 44%of the Non-Catholics were on faith stage 3. Approximately the same percentage of Catholics and non-Catholics were on faith stage 5 (15% and 11% respectively). On the moral staging Catholics were predominatly on stages 4 and 5 (35% each) while 55% of the non-Catholics were on stage 5 and 22% on stage 4.

In looking at Catholic men and Catholic women, the numbers were similar for their faith stages. For the men 57% were on faith stage 3, 28% and 14% on faith stages 4 and 5 respectively. Fifty percent of the women were on faith stage 3 while 33% and 16% were on faith stages 4 and 5

respectively. While the non-Catholic men had 50% on faith stage 5, there were no non-Catholic women on stage 5. Morally, 50% of the non-Catholic men were on stage 5 and 40% of the non-Catholic women. For the Catholic women, one third was on each of the adult stages 3,4, and 5.

Since the numbers were so small, it is impossible to ascertain whether these differences are statistically significant. Rather, this supports the researcher's hypothesis that the difference of structure not content among all the participants would not be very significant.

The richest insights came from the answers to the open-ended questions about concerns, joys, choice of career and purpose of life. One male spoke of career or work as a source of greatest joy and that was because of the contribution his career could make to others. The family was clearly the greatest joy even for men and women with teen age sons and daughters. The lawyer, the doctor, and the scientist with a career in astrophysics were the only ones there who clearly chose their careers. Seven of the men "slipped into their careers" after coming out of the military. The one male under thirty-five backed into his career by trying to avoid the draft in the Vietnam era. One wonders what are the reasons for career choice for the young adult males today. Concerns ranged from predominantly financial ones to family (particularly for the parents of teenagers) to nuclear and environmental destruction with financial anxiety clearly exerting the greatest pressure. By the end of the academic year, three men

had already had job changes and four others were considering changing their jobs. In this latter group, those in education expressed greatest disillusionment with their work. Those dissatisfied with their work did not see it as part of their identity, while the professionals did. The mid-life questions Levinson proposed were only being asked by the men on stage 5.

Discussion of Results

Fowler had presented a rough profile of the faith stages of the 359 interviews he and his associates had given from 1972 to 1981. While giving the caution that "the description of the data collected to this point is provided not to confirm or refute the theory developed herein," it is interesting to see how similar the results are for the age groups 30-40 and 40-50. There is a higher percentage of couples in this study of stage three than in the Fowler data. This could be because we put the mixed stage three persons all together into stage three. It also could be a result of the scoring. Again, it was difficult in scoring the faith stage to discern whether the respondents were merely giving an unquestioned, taught answer to a faith question or whether the response was a thought-out answer couched in conventional religious terms. (One scorer actually put a woman on stage 3-4-5 because of the difficulty of extracting the real thought from the conventional language.) Perhaps because morality has been under greater attack, the couples have been forced to think through moral questions on their own. There are few "pat" answers to moral questions today, so the answers to the moral issues were well thought out

and based on self-chosen principles. Perhaps the attack on faith statements has not been as strong and as prevalent so that the need to move beyond a stage 3 or 4 is not so pressing in faith issues.

But on the questions about prayer, which Fowler does not include in his model, the answers were often unconventional. In answers to the question, "Where and when do you pray?" the answers were varied:

while raking leaves

when fishing

at night looking at the "awesome beauty" of the universe

around the house

driving to work

informal moments at work

It perhaps can be hypothesized that for some active church members, the <u>cognitive meaning</u> aspect is not as averted to as the <u>relational</u> aspect to a God they all described in unconventional terms, drawn out of, not their early education, but out of their own reflection on their lives. They spontaneously answered where and how they prayed. They paused and had difficulty answering the question: "What is the meaning of life?" Even one agnostic who rejected the interventionist God, could accept (since he was an astronomer) a primary cause helping to keep the universe in order. Here are his responses:

> Is it all chance? No. It's not chance. It's a fine interaction between people and events and things and whatnot. Nothing is ever all chance.
>
> There is order. There are fundamental rules in the universe which we all must obey and these rules

create opportunities and a description of how these opportunities is created are called probability or change and it still follows the same fundamental order that structured theuniverse.

WHO STRUCTURED THE UNIVERSE?

Science and metaphysics do not need to conflict. I don't know. I am content with a structured universe.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN A GOD?

Not an interventionist deity. What I do believe is that there is a fundamental order. Now if you start to ascribe emotional and various other manly attributes to a prime mover or order itself, I have trouble with that concept, quite a bit of trouble accepting that.

BUT SOME KIND OF TRANSCENDENT...

It's entirely possible. I just don't know. As much as I think about it, I always get wound up on the horns of my emotions. The horns of my emotions on one and the logic of my senses on the other.

I can't take the interventionist God... A fabric such as the ones the Hindus proposed for the universe which they labeled God that is woven into the universe, part and parcel of it, yes, that could be.

... Well, if you're talking about a primary cause, yes, I'll grant you I believe in a primary cause. The fabric or the laws that have been created by which everything is run, well there is some reason for those being in existence. It is not arbitrary. The laws work too well. That's a personal emotional statement of mind. A prime cause, yes. Now if you wish to label it God, so be it. I'll accept that, but unfortunately I grew up with the meaning of interventionist attached to God.

He even admitted that his reflection on the beauty of the stars at night (peak experience) was a kind of prayer. Here is the dialogue on prayer:

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A SENSE OF ONENESS WITH NATURE?

Well, a sense of peace. Oneness, again is one of those mysterious words. A sense of peace, definitely. Some of the most beautiful things that I can recollect when I was alone with nature... the night sky just before dawn.

WOULD YOU CONSIDER THAT PRAYING?

I suppose it could be because you are suddenly acknowledging the order of the universe, the awesome beauty of the universe...

Since Fowler stresses the difference between content and structure, it was interesting to find a charismatic structurally on stage 5 as was this agnostic, yet with vastly different content. In an analogous way, the charismatic also saw God as ordering, not the impersonal universe, but his own life. He did not see God as an interventionist deity controlling and predirecting his life. Reflecting on his own personal choices he saw an order in his life events analogous to the order that the astronomer saw in the universe. Below are some selections from his interview:

WHERE WOULD YOU SAY HAPPINESS COMES FROM?

Well, I think I'm pretty happy right now and I would say it comes from a kind of freedom that you have in trusting that the Lord is the lord of your life and if you can understand what his plan is for your life and follow that plan, it just works out fantastically well and you just feel good about it and you know he helps you all the time. The incredible thing is he helps me with what I know I can't do myself.

WHEN DID YOU START TO FEEL THIS ABOUT GOD?

I wish I could tell you a good story because I'm in the charismatic renewal. It's been a growing experience for me, growing in the sense that I think I am coming to know the Lord better, coming to understand how he works in my life. I think it's always been going on. (EVEN BEFORE THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT?) Even before that, yes. I cannot point to one, single event in my life...

GOD IS A PERSON FOR YOU, THEN?

I suppose. I don't have an image of God. I couldn't draw you a picture or look at ink blots. I'm not sure that would help me. It's a relationship with a source of good and life and peace.

On the subject of purpose in life, he says:

> ...to fit into God's plan for the world, his kingdom. To fit into that and play my role whatever that happens to be. I don't know the plan; I see it evolving mostly as a person who seems to have been put into situations I find myself in to help people overcome obstacles that they have towards each other, relating to each other in a peaceful way.

When asked, "Why are you a Catholic?" he answered:

For most people , I would answer being a Catholic primarily as a cultural thing... a traditional thing... I was brought up a Catholic. I went to Catholic schools. My parents are Catholic.

BUT I'M ASKING YOU,ARE YOU COMMITTED?

Yeah.. my adult commitment to the Church(the Catholic Church) is based primarilyon faith that it is the closest that I could become to belonging to the Church that Jesus started....

DO YOU THINK THAT JESUS WOULD RECOGNIZE THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH?

I think He would recognize more than just the Roman Catholic Church as His Church. It would take me a while to answer you if you would ask me to list all the churches and say " would he recognize that one and that one"....I think that the divisions that we've seen certainly were not the work of God wanting to split up his church but they were the result of human selfishness and people are people and we see divisions even today inthe Coman Catholic Church.

HOW RECOGNIZE THAT CHURCH

I would recognize it primarily by the fruits that are borne by the people that belong to the Church.

SO WHAT IS CHURCH TO YOU THEN?

Church is God's people ,living together in this loving relationship with each other and with God.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS MORALLY RIGHT?

> I use the law as a guide just like I use the magisterium of the Church. I listen to what they teach, but I don't just because they teach it. I do not accept that necessarily. I integrate that with my experiences. God gave me intelligence and, imperfect as it is, I think I should use it.

The women who were more advanced in faith than their husbands admitted unanimously that the stimulus to their faith growth was the fact that they were teaching in the Religious Education Program of their church. This was primarily true of the Roman Catholics but true in a less dramatic way of the non-Catholics. The need to study the latest research in scriptures practically freed them from any mythic literal remnants in their thought and moved them on to accept the ambiguity and complexity of the Scriptures. When couples taught classes together in their homes, this enabled them to share and talk together about their faith. Three couples were in programs designed to help engaged or young married couples. They admitted that this helped their marriage perhaps more than they felt that they had helped the younger couples.

When questioned about the relation of their faith to their marriage, for the older couples particularly, their faith helped their marriages when there were difficulties and their

marriage strengthened their faith in times of doubt. Three or four of the wives drew their husbands into greater involvement in their church while one or two husbands helped their wifes return to the church. Couples who were on the same level of faith found faith helped their marriage. Those on different levels found the difference a source of "disappointment."

The active involvement of these couples, largely out of the desire to transmit their values to their own children and to others, is a clear manifestation of generativity. It also reveals that the Church to them was not a teacher or an authority. Church to them was a community of believers. The believers mutually supported each other against the financial and social pressures they all felt. Dogma or Church truths were never raised. Church membership gave them a sense of identity and support in life rooted in common tradition and common values.

Summary and Conclusions

To these admittedly self-selected couples, religion was a vital dimension in their lives, a factor which other adult developmentalists have ignored.

The study raises more questions than it solves. It does challenge the cognitive approach to Faith of Fowler in that the relational and prayer aspect was present in agnostics as well as in church affiliated members.

Couples of other ages, particularly in the so-called "unchurched decade" 20 to 30 years of age, divorced adults as well as older non-affiliated couples need to be interviewed.

It can only be said that these couples may indeed represent pockets of people across the United States for whom values and faith are important dimensions.

Methodological questions raised against the other adult researchers for omitting faith questions can be raised against this researcher for asking them. Research bias is always present and the reader needs to be cautious in generalizing and interpreting the results. But some implications for adult education and ministry to adults can clearly be drawn from this preliminary study.

QUESTIONS FOR THE
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR ADULT FAITH D
EVELOPMENT

Margaret Gorman

1. What are your earliest memories? Recall ea
ch age, child-
hood, adolescence, etc.

2. What are turning points in your life?

3. Where and how are you changing now?

4. What are your greatest concerns?

5. What are your greatest joys?

6. What gives you peace?

7. What do you see as the meaning of your lif
What gives meaning to your life? ?

8. With what group do you feel most at home?

9. What is God like for you?

10. How has this changed?

11. What are your hopes for the future?

12. Is there anything for which or for whom yo
u would die?

13. Are there any decisions facing you now?
How are you basing your decisions?

14. Can you be religious without being moral o
r moral without
being religious?

15. Why are you a ____?(Catholic, Lutheran, me
mber of a religion;
agnostic, atheist, etc.)

16. What is the relation of church or synagog
e to religion?

17. Why is there evil?

18. What do you believe happens after death?

19. Can you be religious without belonging to
a religious
institution?

20. The Heinz dilemma (to get a sense of thei
r moral stage) with
all the probing questions.

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